DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 559 EA 023 065

AUTHOR Shanks, Joyce
TITLE Curriculum Standardization and the Role of Teachers.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Guides; Curriculum Problems; Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Educational Objectives; Educational Practices; Educational Testing; Educational Trends; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Curriculum; Ethnography; Student Evaluation; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Morale; Teacher Responsibility; Teaching Conditions

ABSTRACT

Following a description of how the political climate in the 1960s through the 1980s influenced education, this document discusses the effects of districtwide curriculum standardization on Burr Oaks Elementary School in the midwestern village of Burr Oaks. The school's community setting, use of curriculum guides, and initial use of curriculum packages that supply objectives, methods of presentation, and evaluations are described. Next, curriculum changes initiated in the 1983-84 school year by a new superintendent are presented. These include the development of: (1) an organized set of student curriculum goals; (2) a common set of curriculum materials; (3) student evaluation tools to be submitted to the district; and (4) a teacher evaluation program. School observations and interviews with teachers, administrators, and students were conducted during the 1988-89 school year. Teacher responses indicate that the loss of freedom, decreased opportunity for creativity, and need to test frequently or cover large amounts of material left many teachers feeling dissatisfied, frustrated, and pressured. The teachers' use and preparation of the new curriculum is described, and the increased separation of teachers from the knowledge selection, organization, and implementation is explored along with changes in both the role of teachers and the skills required of them. (21 references) (CLA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Curriculum Standardization and the Role of Teachers

by Joyce Shanks
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Paper Presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference
Chicago, April 7, 1991

ED333559

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Shanks
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA023065

Curriculum Standardization and the Role of Teachers

by Joyce Shanks
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Paper Presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference
Chicago, April 7, 1991

The 1980s saw the resurgence of an emphasis on curriculum accountability. This often took the form of curriculum standardization in which the knowledge selected and presented to students was carefully determined, hierarchically developed, and tested in an attempt to make schools more accountable to the public.

It is the goal of this paper to examine some of the reasons for and effects of the curriculum standardization process. Curriculum at one school which was going through a process of reorganization and standardization will be discussed and compared to recent trends in curriculum development. Teachers' feelings about the curriculum change and what they were able to do with the curriculum will be considered. The conclusion will examine possible roles for teachers in curriculum reorganization and development. Before continuing with these goals, it is important to consider the historical influences on curriculum and what that has meant for schools.

The Political Climate Influencing Education in the 1960s Through 1980s

There are complex reasons why the public schools in America have moved recently toward a standardization of their curriculum. Because of schools being labeled as institutions which are "being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" and accused of losing "sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983: 5-6), it is no wonder that the

ED323065

public has felt a need to more closely examine what is happening in the schools and attempt to set standards to improve them. It is helpful to study the recent past to more clearly understand some of the reasons for these trends.

Ira Shor (1986) discusses the 1970s and 1980s as a time of great social and political change. According to Shor, it was brought on as a reaction to the protest culture of the 1960s. This was a time for traditional authority to regain control in society, education being one of the major areas for struggle and redefinition. The discourse became one of a return to high standards, excellence in education, and an emphasis on quality as opposed to equality in education.

> 'The right words' had to be retaught if the authorities were to regain their legitimacy. The 'wrong' words of radical opposition had to be obscured, to hide what the 1960s had illuminated, to opaque domination in society, to conceal even education's role in reproducing dominant ideology. (Shor, 1986: 11)

The areas of restoration that Shor describes are in career education, literacy, and a push toward academic excellence. Career education emphasized job training which supports a work ethic that would prepare youth for the official culture of the adult, wage-earning society. The literacy drive came into focus after years of decline in standardized test scores which supported the argument that the quality of standards in American schools had fallen. The back-to-basics movement supported a push toward the use of a traditional pedagogy which had been used in the "golden years of education" before the decline of test scores. Struggles to raise minimum competencies put the emphasis on accountability that helped to blame the victims of the educational process rather than the structure of education. If all schools teach the same basics and test the students through similar, standardized tests, then it would be the students' fault if they did not do well, ignoring data that supports the fact that people of color, females, and working-class students do not do as well

on standardized tests as white, middle-class males do. According to Shor, all of these movements focused attention away from the struggles toward equality and justice and toward a value system controlled by the conservative values of a capitalist society which emphasize traditional values, middle class views of knowledge, and competition toward an assumed meritocratic society.

Ann Bastian et. al., (1985) also argue that economic and social problems in the United States have led many concerned citizens, politicians, and educators to examine the problem-laden educational system for possible solutions. They view the recent push toward excellence as a possible way for schools to combat existing problems in society. Yet, Bastian claims that these competitive structures for school improvement are actually based on an "elitist concept of meritocracy" (Bastian, 1985: 7) which assumes that by structuring forms of excellence and methods to achieve excellence, the result will be the improvement of all schools. The educational process will resemble the economic marketplace where success is supposedly based on an individual's ability and hard work. This assumption is based on the idea that "equality is an irreducible condition of quality education, just as inequality is the determining condition of the present crisis." (Bastian, 1985b: 34)

The idea that standards, and therefore quality education, can be restored is based on a premise that there was once quality education for all students in the U.S. Bastian describes three myths of school performance which underlie the principles of the conservative educational reform. One myth is that there was at one time a "golden age" of schooling where all students were equally served. The reality is that historically there has been a two-tiered system with quality schools for the middle class and poorer schools for the working class which worked to validate their placement in unskilled jobs. The second myth is that there was an egalitarian reform in the 1960s. Yet, whereas attempts to

improve schools were made with some success, Bastian says that in reality the reforms fell far short of making any major impact on the two-tiered structure of schools. The third myth is that the schools' problems are a major cause of the economic decline in the U.S., therefore assuming a return to high standards would help to improve the economic and social problems we now face. The authors argue that the reverse is actually true: ". . .economic development has directed school change; economic status has determined school achievement; economic mobility has extended school opportunity. School functions have been largely subordinated to economic trends and, at most, play a supportive not decisive role in the economy." (Bastian, 1985: 50)

The political and social climate in the U.S. which has influenced movements toward accountability and standardization in schools has also been evident in the government's education policy. Joel Spring (1976) argues that the federal government's involvement in education increased in the 1950s and 1960s because of cold war policy and the civil rights movement. These were important national policy issues that forced the government to take more overt action in education than it had in the past. The action took the form of setting up policy and taking a leadership role in attempting to ensure that the policies were being followed.

Spring describes the federal government's cold war strategies in education as an attempt to improve education in the areas of math, science, and foreign languages. The goal was to make sure that U.S. students were educated well enough to be competitive with the Soviets, to be more technologically advanced, and, therefore, to assure national security. The focus on education led to a concentrated look at the curriculum in the schools. Large sums of money were funnelled into these projects. Curriculums developed by the Physical Science Study Committee, the School Mathematics Study Group, and

others, became models for other curriculums. They marked the emergence of curriculum developed by professionals outside of the education community. Scientists and mathematicians developed their respective curriculums, taking those decisions out of the hands of teachers and local districts. With large sums of money being spent, such as the six million dollars by the Physical Science Study Committee between 1956 and 1961 (Spring, 1976: 114), the curriculums were able to be developed and distributed for national use, often replacing old guides developed and used by teachers. The development of the curriculums and texts led to a nationalized curriculum of sorts, not through the districts being required to use the material, but by the national distribution and financial support the material received. The federal government was not directly determining the curriculum, but by funding the curriculum development and the local districts' ability to purchase the products, the result was to make the programs very similar to the employment of national curriculums.

Arthur E. Wise (1979) also describes the education policy of the late 1960s and 1970s as becoming increasingly determined by state governments, the federal government, and the courts, and less determined by individual schools. To be accountable, the goals of government policy were those borrowed from the scientific management principles of industry. Scientific management places management-level employees in control of the conception of the work and the workers do increasingly routinized forms of labor. Workers maintain little control over their own work, since their jobs are defined by standardized procedures. Workers are easily evaluated since the management knows what they are to be doing at all times.

According to Wise, the government has borrowed from the principles of scientific management to obtain similar hierarchical accountability. The

result of this top-down policy control was to build a more bureaucratic system, even though the original intent was to build a fairer education system that could better meet the needs of all the citizens and students. As the bureaucracy and policies were built, individual schools' attempts to reject the policies made the policies all the more difficult to succeed, yet acceptance worked to build more bureaucracy.

The bureaucratic process worked to redefine the curriculum and teachers' roles. Educational goals, to be more easily measured and evaluated, were reduced to basic skills that could be measured by standardized tests to evaluate the effects of the education policies. Top-down policy implementation placed the teachers in a less professional role. They had less control over what they were to teach and how they would teach it. They, as well as students, were "objects" of large scale attempts to professionalize schools by mandating what should occur in schools and how it should occur. The result was that individual freedoms were subordinated to the welfare of the state, and the teachers and schools' autonomy was secondary to mandated, measurable (therefore certifiable) learning.

The government's attempts to build equal opportunity by emphasizing achievement and accountability worked not only to build the bureaucracy of schools but to place emphasis on external goals that worked to standardize the top-down controls placed on schools. Dennis Carlson describes the bureaucratic process of educational planning as working to reproduce the traditional definitions of schooling. "It is a way, then, of overriding the long tradition of local school autonomy in America to ensure that local districts organize the instructional program in ways that do not fundamentally alter the essential structures and processes of capitalism." (Carlson, 1988: 99-100)

The role of the federal government changed somewhat during the 1980s. David Clark and Terry Astuto (1986,1988) describe the political changes in federal education policy during the Reagan administration. The federal policy worked to support the goals of the conservative restoration that Shor and Bastian describe. The foundation of the policy was a "devolution, that is, the transfer of authority and initiative for educational policy and programs from the federal to the state and local levels." (Astuto and Clark, 1988: 361) They describe devolution as having the effect of decentralizing authority, deregulating programs, and diminishing the fiscal support. The language of the federal policy stressed the need to decrease the federal role in the social and regulatory education procedures and instead emphasize state and local districts' rights to decide their own policy and goals. The language shifted from a 1960s emphasis on equity to excellence, needs and access to ability, and social and welfare concerns to economic and productivity concerns. (Clark and Astuto, 1986: 5)

The bureaucratization of the schools resulting from social and political pressures is especially salient as a result of the current economic crisis. The State is under pressure to legitimate its actions and be accountable to business and the public. In its attempt to find possible solutions, the State tries to transport the problem to other agencies. By pointing blame downward, it can be easier to identify what seem to be solutions to some of the economic problems. As a result, when the government is going through periods of economic decline, schools get refocused attention on their problems and possible remedies are suggested. It is schools which are not providing the trained workers; it is schools which are not training the scientists who could lead business back into a competitive mode; and it is schools which are not

enforcing "traditional" moral standards, the traditions which suggest conservative goals and standards in the public and private sectors.

Therefore, the government has increased its focus on schools because of the need for accountability to the public and to business. This was part of the background setting at the time of the release of the national reports starting in 1983. They were the result of years of concern and debate on the quality of education that the schools were providing, as well as the very role schools should assume in the U.S. *A Nation At Risk,* the most famous of the reform reports, lists recommendations that clearly favored a solution based on the re-establishment of a competitive institution emphasizing high standards, standardized evaluation, and a curriculum emphasizing a return to the basics. Though the varied reports did have some divergent recommendations, Gail P. Kelly (1985) argues that they do have some general points of agreement.

> The reports stand in agreement that the curriculum of the schools needs revision; most insist that "more" be taught., Almost all the reports agree that students should have fewer choices in what they study and that there should be less curricular differentiation between college and noncollege bound students. (Kelly, 1985: 35)

Many reports do emphasize a renewed concentration on the curriculum. They also tend to take unfavorable views of teachers, blaming them for some of education's problems. They say that many of the good teachers leave the profession and the poorer ones stay. Therefore, they recommend merit pay, higher salaries, and improvement in the teacher education programs. (Kelly, 1985)

To summarize, in recent years the schools have had refocused attention from the government, public, and business. Often, the attention is particularly on improving schools' curriculum. Yet when examining the influences on schools' curriculum, it is important to consider the role teachers have played in the changing school politics and curriculum development.

Shor, Bastian, Spring, Wise, Clark and Astuto all describe school changes initiated by government and society. Teachers and their roles are noticeably absent. Spring describes the curriculum as being increasingly developed by non-educators, people separated from what happens in the day-to-day existence in schools. Wise builds on this even more and describes the implementation of scientific management practices in management-level employees which works to routinize their labor and take control from workers, or in this case teachers, and replace their work with standardized procedures.

These are crucial points. For when discussing curriculum changes throughout the recent past, we must realize the lack of power that teachers have possessed. The recent history of curriculum development has often silenced the voice of teachers. Curriculum has been defined by outsiders. This is an important point to consider when viewing how current curriculum is developed and the role teachers play in it. Therefore, this paper will now turn to the setting of one elementary school in a district moving toward a standardized curriculum, to examine the roles teachers have taken in curriculum planning and their attitudes about it.

The Background to This Ethnography

As a response to political pressures to improve the educational process, many school districts have been examining their curriculums and working toward improving the curriculum presented to their students. They have moved toward various levels of standardization in an attempt to make the schools more accountable to the public. The standards are planned and organized by professionals and textbook publishers who use the psychology of learning theory and children's developmental stages to write curriculum that

can be said to fit the nature and needs of children. The curriculum is often developed by subject area specialists in the various professional fields who use their expertise to develop a scope and sequence of skills that can best teach children an appropriate knowledge base. The material is tested on a sample market so that when educators use the material they can claim to the public that their students' grades are valid and reliable.

The "teacher proof" curriculum packages and standardized basal texts divorce the conceptualization and development of learning objectives from the institution of skills in the classroom. The packages supply the objectives, methods of presentation, and evaluations. Learning is preset, goals predetermined. All students go through the same basic material varied most often by pace. Students can work their way through various skill levels with success being measured by percentage grades and by "finishing". These curriculum packages can be found at all grade levels and subject areas so that any teacher can use them to develop a curriculum for students.

Burr Oaks Elementary Schools is an example of a school in a district which is working toward standardizing the curriculum and implementing these curriculum packages in an attempt to improve the overall quality of education for its students. Therefore, this school became the focus of my research. I began by gathering all the data that I could on the background of the school and the school community to understand the school's history and traditions. I examined relevant documents from the local school board, administration, and the school to get a clearer picture of the setting in which the school was situated. I examined the official curriculum of the school, studying the curriculum guides, goals of the school, basal texts, and other relevant material that the teachers and school officials had.

The focus of the study was one fifth grade classroom. That classroom was observed two to three times a week for four months during the 1988-89 school year. All observation notes were shared with the teacher to receive her feedback and interpretations. This was done to keep the teacher informed of my project development, to let her check for accuracy, to comment on my interpretations, to receive her interpretations, and to keep a good flow of communication during the research process. Six other classrooms were observed for shorter time periods to see how curriculum was being used by other teachers in the school. I also attended staff and district meetings. Interviews of teachers, administrators, and students were the other form of data collection used in the study.

The Community and District

Burr Oaks is a small village of a little over 1000 people. The larger surrounding township has 3300 people. It is located near a large city in the Midwest, to which many of its residents commute. The middle-class population of the 130 year old village is all white. The community is proud of its "small town character and lifestyle" and works to preserve that atmosphere. The community is particularly proud of its school. Many community activities are centered there. Burr Oaks Elementary School is the only school located there. The middle school and high school students attend school in a nearby city. The communities formed a joint school district in the 1960s, called the Lake Haven-Burr Oaks School District. The enrollment of the district is 1800 people, 428 of whom attended Burr Oaks in the 1988-89 school year.

The school district has had a change in its district curriculum over the past decade. At the beginning of the 1980s, the district had a curriculum based on curriculum guidelines which were booklets in the subject areas of

language, science, and social studies, and which were divided by grade level and skills within the subjects. Objectives were written as a list of basic goals.

The curriculum guidelines were given to teachers as suggestions to use in their own curriculum development. They were not prescriptions to follow. The social studies curriculum guideline, for example, specifically stated that it should be simply a guide to provide teachers a framework within which to work, while still giving them the freedom to develop their own lessons and units.

The curriculum format at the elementary level started to change in the early 1980s. At first teachers asked for text series or curriculum packages to be purchased that would give them more material to use while still using their curriculum guidelines. Series in math and science were chosen with the understanding that the teachers would still be in charge of their curriculum development and presentation, and the book series would be supplementary. Teachers reported that they were happy with the changes made in their curriculum. They had been involved in the decision-making process and were pleased with their new texts. Yet this was the time when the process of new curriculum development started to change.

The 1983-84 school year marked the arrival of a new superintendent in the Lake Haven-Burr Oaks School District. Dr. Cullen quickly started instituting a mastery learning program into the district. His definition of mastery learning is that all children can learn, given the proper amount of time. Teachers would need to present material, test it, and reteach and retest the material until all children were able to reach 80% mastery of tested objectives. With the idea that all children can learn, his ultimate goal would be to have a report card which had the grades of 'A', 'B', and 'Incomplete' on it,

assuming that all children were on their way to learning what the district defined as important for them to learn.

To successfully complete a mastery learning program, Dr. Cullen wanted to develop a common set of objectives. All teachers would be held accountable to those objectives to provide a better overall curriculum program for the students. To make those objectives be the foundation and building block of the district's curriculum would be to have an efficient program. As Dr. Cullen told me:

> It is nice to deviate and smell the roses, and it is all right to smell them if it is part of your objectives. You can't just do whatever you want to do. You are going to have kids who have an unbalanced curriculum. We hope our kids have a balanced curriculum. That's what our experts are advising and we're developing. And no single teacher has the right to deviate from the curriculum.

As part of his goal to work toward mastery learning, Dr. Cullen decided to have the district re-examine its curriculum to have an overall philosophy that the administration and teachers could work toward implementing. With common objectives they would have continuity across the district about what goals were important to teach and test. Therefore, they started to work on an outcome based education program by planning a more unified curriculum based on predetermined objectives, developing a common set of instructional materials, and an assessment program to accompany the materials.

After the initial institution of mastery learning in January, 1984, the district started looking in more detail at the elementary curriculum and its perceived lack of continuity. Subject areas were considered and new curriculum planned around the mastery learning goals. There was a division among the teachers about what they wanted for the curriculum. Some teachers liked the freedom of the curriculum guidelines and others wanted supplementary materials purchased to help them with curriculum planning.

Others wanted more specific materials and series purchased for the subject areas. Yet in language and later in social studies new series were purchased which replaced the curriculum guidelines and any supplementary material. The teachers then had series to be the foundation of the curriculum in all the major subject areas.

By the 1987-88 school year, the teachers also had a new coding system to monitor their students' progress which was introduced to them by the administration. For the most part, the district had common objectives based on a common curriculum, since each elementary teacher by then had the same texts as all the other elementary teachers in reading, language, spelling, math, and science, with social studies following that year. This enabled the elementary principals to develop class profiles for each subject area. They were made up of lists of all students in every classroom, and objectives from each test. The teachers filled them in by keeping track of all problems that students got right or wrong on all test questions. The objectives for each unit were matched up to the differing test questions. This required that the teachers use the texts' tests as their main source of student evaluation, instead of any of their own evaluation tools.

Teachers were required to turn these class profiles in to their principals so that the progress of the children toward an 80% mastery learning level could be followed. The teachers felt that the use of class profiles resulted in a need to use the texts in all subject areas in order to have the students do well on their class profiles. Whereas a year before, for example, many teachers were rarely using language texts, this school year they felt required to use them. Teachers reported that by the time they taught toward the tests they needed to give in social studies, science, language, and

math particularly, and reading to a lesser degree, they had little time to present any of their own curriculum goals.

To summarize, as the 1988-89 school year started in which I spent time observing at Burr Oaks Elementary School, the teachers had a mastery learning program which had an organized set of curriculum goals for their district, a common set of curriculum materials, evaluation tools to use on their children and to turn in to the district, and, also, a teacher evaluation program based on Madeline Hunter's mastery teaching.

Teachers' Reactions to the Curriculum Standardization

Of course, the teachers were well aware of the recent curriculum changes. They lamented the freedom they used to have in the curriculum planning process. Gail Baker, a first grade teacher, remembered the movement from the use of curriculum guides to textbooks.

> I was here when we actually did some writing of curriculum, when we had our kindergarten through fifth grade curriculum where we identified entry skills and ending skills and what you would master and what year you would teach what particular objective. And now the change of administration, we sort of disbanded that little book that we had, our curriculum guide that we had written and spent many years on committee writing. We had committees for science, and math, and everywhere. I think it was mostly with goals and the objectives and then specifics and whether you would master it that year, whether it was review, or whether it was introduction. And then we also had it mapped out where at this particular grade level that if you had a lot of 'M's then that meant that you better be sure that you taught those. And that left you wide open in terms of selecting a curriculum to go along with that particular level. And now what we've done is, I think we kind of use that as an off-shoot starting basis, so that the guides or the new textbooks that we picked for the last couple of years are sort of going along with that. . . But now I don't think that they give that to the teachers any more. I haven't seen those for a while.

Joan Schneider, a third grade teacher, thought that the curriculum had basically become the textbooks.

> The formal curriculum in this district is basically the books at this point. Written curriculum isn't distributed to teachers beyond that. I

> think as part of the process they try to match the textbook with the curriculum that they have in mind, but you never can find a complete match. And teachers, for the most part, aren't aware of what they are suppose to teach beyond, besides, or in lieu of the textbook. So, pretty much, the philosophy I get to teach is the textbook. The prioritizing you get is to teach as far as you can in the textbook. . . Beyond that there isn't a lot of time, and I think that when people are required to use a textbook real rigidly you tend to not do other things because you know that the textbook is more than you can do in a year anyway.

Miss Schneider discussed the lack of freedom in the curriculum and what freedom teachers actually had to do their own activities.

> I don't think you can do, you can add, what I would call units. No, I don't think that there is time for that. No, I think that our flexibility is given in the methods that we want to use to teach the unit. I don't think there is time to add things.

The teachers implemented the district's curriculum despite what they felt were its limitations. Yet it was a site of struggle. The form that the curriculum took was something over which the teachers tried to gain some degree of control. It was an area which they felt they could use some creativity. Teachers commented that they may have to use the objectives that the books gave them and prepare students for the books' tests, but they felt that they could try and do that in some varying ways that could better promote student interest and give teachers and students more curricular choice.

They talked about trying to build on the curriculum and were very vocal about what they felt were the weaknesses of the curriculum. Jackie Miller seemed to particularly feel the pressure to build on the curriculum and add interest to it for her students' sake.

> I feel that particularly in the science area that we have to supplement that textbook because it is too narrow focused. . . The textbook is too limiting. I don't feel that I am being, I'm not, I'd be very accountable if I just used the text and it would be really easy to do. For then I could just flip through the pages when lesson planning and teaching it and the texts are just right there and that would be real hunky-dory. But I don't then feel that I'm being the teacher that I should be. I feel like I've failed my students. I guess that is what I'm trying to say. So that is why I do it the other way. I feel that the textbooks, many of them, are very limited in their focus.

LuAnn Martin, a fifth grade teacher, commented:

> I notice that the kids, by the time they get to fifth grade, when we bring out the language books, it's, "Uh, Language?", which tells me they've had every lesson in the book in second, third, and fourth grade, you know? Or at least, "Hey, we've done this!" It's been done to death. And so I think that it's probably the textbook-oriented focus that it's too easy to become lecturers in front of the class and it's not meeting the needs of the kids who still want to be involved in other ways besides listening.

She also felt that the curriculum and its accompanying testing program had some negative effects on students.

> I think they (the students) feel frustrated with the tests, I pick that up a lot. I feel, I think they feel like they are getting tested more and more, which they are. So again, it feeds into that attitude shift where learning is identified or equated with performance on a test, it's not equated with the experience, the pleasure, the sharing, the communicating, the, it's not, they don't see that as learning. And I think they become more passive in the process because it's almost as if we are saying to them, "You have to sit there and just receive, receive, receive. Then on appointed days you will give it back." We're not involving them, not as much as we have in the past. In the old days when we had more project-oriented learning units that were built and you just involved all your language in it, and all of your math in that unit, all of your social studies, or whatever that unit was, it seemed to offer more of a freedom to have kids share in the units. You never tested the way we test now. We evaluated all of the time, there were other tools of evaluation, not a standardized test, multiple choice or true false. Don't they have enough of that in life without starting it in third grade?

Miss Martin went on to describe the curriculum as working to disinterest the students with the learning process.

> Kids seem to be more concerned about surface things, getting by, more than they are about really exploring something and getting time to feel that they can. When you are just going through a survey of everything then where is the time. . . It (the student response to the curriculum) is a real individual thing. I've had kids groaning at social studies this year and I don't know why. I don't know if it is part of my attitude that has projected itself on them, to be fair, it could be that. I don't know if it's; I don't know why. It's boggled my mind because in the past it's always been something that the kids have been interested in. Science they are usually pretty interested in. Although I've had groans with that, it could be the kids. And yet the irony is, if they are not dong something in the basal, they want to know when they are going to be back in the basal. Part of them feel security with having that there and they identify that with reading and they know that that is what reading is. And so when they are not there, they wonder if they are reading. I haven't figured it out.

Miss Schneider's comments mirror Miss Martin's concerns about the effects of this curriculum on students.

> This year I've had some very good students, very good students, and when we have optional enrichment opportunities they don't take part in them. They don't take part in them. I have been wondering why. I've come to the conclusion that the basic reason that they don't is because they are never given any time. I mean, I literally never have time when the students can do 15 minutes of whatever they like. There is never time and that is real different from how I started teaching. Kids had a lot more time to explore their interests, maybe, that sort of thing. We are just very tied in. I have felt very pressured about that.

Mrs. Miller also questioned the use of textbooks when compared to other curriculum options.

> I feel that the textbook might turn off certain kids who might not have an interest in a particular subject area, and who with the other activities that I try to do I feel that they're more motivated. . . Every year I have been able to do it less. I've been forced to go more and more into the book. Last year our tally marking, I was told I wasn't doing enough language arts. I had spent the last two-and-a-half months on the Regional Writing Conference with the kids. I had a first place winner in the county and I had a merit winner in the county and he (one of the district administrators) says I need to give them more language tests.

Alice Cooper, a fifth grade teacher, had similar sentiments about the effects of the curriculum on students and teachers. She summed up the use of the formal school curriculum by saying this:

> First of all I can tell you the weakness to start off with. It's monotonous, you read, do the worksheet, read, worksheet, read, worksheet, and everything is directly from the book. The positive thing for the teacher is that you feel secure. It is laid out for you. You don't have to scratch and look for things. I think you can take curriculums and branch off of them but unfortunately when we have a check off system, a test system, and tally sheet, you have to do something and tally it. And they have laid out where they would like us. . . It's a secure thing with the curriculum, but I think sometimes it would be nice when an interest comes along that you could study on it instead of having to stick with the written curriculum that you have that you have to cover.

Other teachers also felt that this curriculum use had effects on teachers. LuAnn Martin felt that the limitations placed teachers under a great deal of stress.

> There is a lot of stress that goes along with that (using the district curriculum) and it is taking its toll. And there is a lot of undermining of one's integrity and self-worth that goes along with that, that is taking its toll. And we try to communicate that to our principal and he thinks that we bring that on ourselves. So that costs something too down the road. And it is all these intangibles that you can't measure and probably will never show up and the public will probably go on blissfully happy, "Gosh, we're getting all these great textbooks and the tests." Consider the pressure when you're told again about the tests. That these new tests that we have to use, and here is the documentation that we want you to make on how each student does on these tests and each objective of these tests. That is considerable pressure. Considerable. I don't know anybody who feels comfortable standing aside from the book and not using it. As much as we verbalize that we hate it, I mean particularly the language book, there is a lot of uproar about that. And even though we've been told by our principal that it doesn't matter if we don't use the book as long as we can demonstrate using the tests, that they can still understand and have learned, he doesn't care how we teach the concepts as long as we use the tests. I mean the pressure is still there. I mean we still feel the pressure because the test has become the new standard and if you want to make sure that you know what a direct object is then you've got to give them a few examples out of the book so they are familiar with the format so that they can do well on the test. I mean you're talking about a language book that has I don't know how many chapters, and a social studies book that has got too many chapters, a math book that has got like 14-15. What do they think we are doing all day? How do we possibly cover that material with kids that are virtually non-readers?

Gail Baker's concerns mirrored those of Miss Martin.

> I really think there is a lot of curriculum to teach; a lot more than a lot of people realize. Plus, somewhere in between there you know you are suppose to work on values because a lot of it is counseling your kids with getting along with others. And sometimes you feel frustrated about doing some of these social kinds of things that you use to do with committees and that, because you feel you have to pound the curriculum, get through with this activity, or quick, we've got to do this experiment. And sometimes I feel that that is a great loss. You feel, well, gee, you can't take time for this, even though you use to feel that this was a fun activity to do, but can we just get it in there? Well, maybe we'd better just do these worksheets so that they pass the test. You know what I am trying to say? Sometimes that is very frustrating.

The teachers complained about the district's curriculum, its effects on students and themselves, and they discussed how they wanted to build beyond it. It is important to consider how successful they actually were in this process. That is what will be discussed next.

Teachers' Preparation and Use of Curriculum

The teachers admitted the problems with the curriculum and stated that they wanted to build on the textbooks. In practice, however, the vast majority of lessons which were observed came directly from the textbooks. Teachers followed the objectives of the lessons and used the materials and activities that the texts suggested. They rarely built on what the texts presented. There were notable attempts when teachers did try to build beyond the curriculum. This occurred at several levels. Most of the examples occurred at times when the teachers were still trying to follow the curriculum fairly closely. There were attempts to relate the texts more specifically to students' lives while still using the book, by using students in the examples which explained particular concepts instead of the books' examples. Or there were times when teachers would augment particular assignments from the books. Teachers would use the concepts from the books but have a different reinforcement activity to assign to the students. Occasionally, they would develop learning centers based on particular concepts that the books presented that would extend students' knowledge and experiences that students were to do with any free time. At other times the teachers built beyond the texts based on what they felt were the texts' limitations. Jackie Miller, a fifth grade teacher, had been one of the teachers who avoided using the language text until it was required of teachers by the superintendent. When she did use it she added a writing assignment every week or two because she felt the book did not allow the students enough writing time. So even though she used the text as the foundation for her language arts curriculum, she did add to it. These were all small additions to the curriculum, yet they were the most frequently occurring additions.

There were a few examples of using the text as a foundation but building quite a bit beyond it. One example occurred in the fifth grade classes. Early in the year the teachers presented an environmental education unit based on the science book. To augment the text presentation, the teachers planned a two day trip to an outdoor science center. They based all the lessons preparing for the trip and during the trip on the text, yet developed each concept in more detail by giving students hands-on experiences and giving them time to investigate nature on their own at the science center. The students, parents, and teachers reacted very positively to the trip. Some of the teachers who came along on the trip sat at lunch the first day there and commented that the children seemed more motivated while there than when they were in the classroom and that they were learning more about nature than they possibly could any other way. The students requested that more activities like that be planned. The parents of fourth graders talked to the teachers soon after that trip to request that they do it again the next year for their children.

The problem with the trip was the amount of time that it took. They spent a little over a month on the entire unit. Yet the teachers had taken both science and social studies time to do the unit. Therefore, they were behind in both areas. Even though they felt very pleased about the unit, they were very concerned about how far behind they were in those two areas. The end result was the more time teachers took to do extra units the farther behind they were, especially since they found it difficult to finish entire textbooks in one year only using the textbook curriculum. That made them less likely to deviate from the textbook curriculum in the future to help make up for the lost time. Therefore, activities such as the environmental education unit were rarely ever used by the teachers, despite their goals to the contrary.

The fifth grade teachers commented on their lack of time after that science unit. When doing their lesson planning together, as two of the fifth grade teachers often did, they consciously planned on spending less time for experimentation and the development of lessons separate from the science book in the future because they were already so far behind. This point is augmented by the fact that the teachers already felt that they had very little time to spend teaching science and social studies. In the beginning of the year as these two teachers planned out their schedules, they could only fit each of the two subjects in three days a week. During the second week of classes, they had one of their many planning meetings, this time in social studies. They discussed how they could possible fit in all the activities that they wanted to do and still make it through the curriculum. Jackie Miller said, "I have to fit social studies in to give creativity a chance. It is a time that I use it in the curriculum."

This was the pattern at many of their planning sessions. One day during one of their planning sessions when they were working on science lessons, they got into a discussion of what their lesson planning was like two to three years ago. They said that they had been much more comfortable with science then. This year the district told the teachers that they should be getting through more of the science units in the text than they had done in the past. The year before the other grade school in the district, Washington, had made it through seven of the ten units while at Burr Oaks, they had only done six of the ten. They felt the pressure to add an additional unit, or more, despite the fact that they were already behind because of the environmental education unit that they designed.

One half day a month the teachers of the Lake Haven-Burr Oaks district have a release time for curriculum meetings. During the November release

day, the same two fifth grade teachers, Jackie Miller and LuAnn Martin, got permission from their principal to skip the curriculum meeting and work together on their lesson planning instead. During that time they planned their social studies and science activities until the winter vacation. They did not develop any ideas beyond the textbook, again for the expressed concern that they would get further behind if they did that. They did, however, feel that the chapter had some "nice activities" and that the students were enjoying it. They took their time that day to plan the pacing of the lessons. They worked the entire afternoon on the scheduling since they were trying to combine lessons, units, and tests because they felt that doing that was necessary so as to not fall further behind. They had permission from their principal to combine some of the tests as long as they could document what test they did use. They spent the afternoon doing that and then continued with the same the next day during a forty-five minute preparation time that they had together and during their lunch hour.

Mrs. Miller started out the meeting on the second day saying that she had gone home and thought a lot about the plans that they had made the day before. She said that she felt bothered by the idea that they would be rushed and perhaps not teach things as well or as thoroughly as they could because of the pressure they felt from the district to get a certain amount done during the year. She said that she would rather be thorough so that the students could learn more and she could build on the book with all of the interesting material that she had accumulated through the years. She repeated her philosophy to Miss Martin, as she often did, and with Miss Martin in agreement. She said that to simply teach straight from the book to get it done would go against what she believed in. It would also, she said, covertly be supporting the administration's

policies for social studies being done their way, using the book and getting it done, rather than following her own lesson and unit designs.

Mrs. Miller then continued by pulling out some related units that she had developed in years past around their social studies topic of Native Americans. They both discussed what they had done in the past, other resources, and things they could use to make the book more interesting. They did include some of those activities over the next two months, but in practice, they still followed the lessons that the text presented quite closely. Mrs. Miller had expressed a desire to build beyond the administration's curriculum goals, yet her actual ability to do that was limited by how busy she was and her need to make it through the vast curriculum. In other words, the intensification of her labor because of the testing programs' demands on her and because of the vast curriculum she had to teach, limited her ability to develop her own goals and curriculum.

Other teachers shared their concerns. During that same November curriculum release time other elementary teachers had an opportunity to express their feelings in a public setting. The School Evaluation Consortium met with the teachers and administrative representative on the science committee. They reported that the elementary teachers felt they were under increased pressure from the administration to do a certain number of units in the science book that year. They said that when the committee had first purchased the books years before, the books were to be used only as references and that teachers were to be able to plan on their own. They said that the intention was never to make the books the center of the science curriculum. The science committee said that they supported the teachers using a unit approach, developing their own curriculum, and using the books as a resource. Yet the fact still remained that the teachers had to give the tests

and fill in the tally for each unit, therefore, no changes were made in science the rest of the year.

Later that same month the teachers at Burr Oaks School had a staff meeting in which the teachers expressed their feelings to their principal, Mr. Kaufman, about how rushed they felt in social studies. They said that the initial expectations of this, the first year with the texts, were that the teachers were to finish the entire book. They said in the meeting that they now realized that they would not be able to finish the texts at any grade level. Mr. Kaufman said that the administrators did not feel they necessarily would be able to finish the texts. The teachers expressed a desire to have grade group meetings soon so that they could prioritize the texts at each grade level to relieve some of the pressure. The teachers were able to express their feelings at this meeting, but it still did not change the pressure they felt to teach toward the tests and to work rapidly through the curriculum. For as with the discussion teachers had about the science curriculum with an administrative representative, no changes were made as to curriculum expectations and the teachers felt obligated to work through the texts as quickly as possible. This made the job of making any changes in the textbook curriculum difficult to initiate and, therefore, rarely done.

A synopsis of the curriculum use at Burr Oaks School shows that the teachers wanted to take time to build beyond the curriculum, but were worried when they did because of the amount of time it took. They were responsible for presenting a great deal of curriculum which they were to cover in a short period of time. They also needed to prepare students for the textbooks' texts. The combination of a large volume of curriculum, very specialized tests, and what the teachers perceived to be too little time to accomplish the goals, made the teachers very unlikely to build on to the curriculum even though they

often complained about the curriculum and spoke of their desires to change it. Thus units such as the outdoor environmental unit were the exception rather than the norm at Burr Oaks School. When teachers did build beyond the textbook curriculum it was usually done by adding a little on to the activities already provided by the texts rather than planning their own goals and activities. Teachers were, in reality, separated from the curriculum development process, and it was a source of tension for them.

This is an important point to consider. Teachers are not playing much of a role in curriculum planning when the school curriculum is dependent upon a textbook. Yet that is a common development in schools that are reacting to pressures such as those described earlier in the paper. As schools are increasingly getting closer scrutiny from the public to make sure that they are effectively carrying out their duties to educate all children, the response is often to initiate a textbook curriculum to increase accountability to the public.

The Role of Teachers in Curriculum Development: The Deskilling and Reskilling of Teachers

The discussion earlier in the paper which centered on the political climate influencing education in the 1960s through the 1980s, showed some general tendencies of schools throughout the nation to rely more and more on the use of a standardized curriculum. As schools moved toward a more standardized curriculum they relied on outside experts and textbook publishers to write the curriculum used by their teachers. Ira Shor wrote about how the conservatives in power in the U.S. sought to regain control in society by seeking to control the standards, pedagogy, and curriculum in schools. Ann Bastian et. al., argued that economic and social problems during that time

period led many in society to examine schools for the solutions to these problems. Yet they said that, "Highly bureaucratic administrative structures often strip teachers of the opportunity to shape their work creatively. Excessive standardization- along with large classes, supervisory duties, excessive paperwork, and fragmented work periods- reduce teachers to caretakers and technicians." (Bastian, 1985: 107)

According to Joel Spring, the federal government's involvement in education was the result of its concern over national policy issues. This led to the government's interest in improved curriculum, developed by national experts, to replace the curriculum developed by teachers. Arthur Wise also described how the federal and state governments increasingly took control over education in recent decades. Using scientific management, schools developed top-down control to increase accountability for their actions. Teachers simply instituted the curriculum, they did not help to develop it.

The data in this ethnography supports the evidence offered by these authors who discuss the political influences on schools' curriculum over the past three decades. The focus has led toward a more standardized curriculum and this has occurred at the expense of teachers' involvement in curriculum planning. The curriculum in this district was based on the textbook curriculum. Classroom decisions were taken out of the hands of teachers. They were separated from curriculum conception and the intellectual and political process of curriculum development. Teachers took a secondary role in the setting of standards for their students, even though they knew their students' abilities, needs, and interests better than any textbook authors could possibly anticipate.

Since the formal school curriculum is what counts as valid knowledge, it is a source of power for those who control the curriculum. The power of

knowledge selection in this district, and many others, lies in the hands of textbook publishers. This is giving a very important role to textbooks, at the expense of the teachers' role as curriculum developers. The political implications of this are very important and must be considered.

Teachers have increasingly become separated from knowledge selection, organization, and implementation. Controls have been put on teachers and the curriculum to make the curriculum used in the school more accountable to the public. In practice, this use of the curriculum is an example of the proletarianization of the teaching profession involving the deskilling of teachers' work through the application of technical controls on their actions in the classroom. (Apple, 1982, 1986) The technical controls are used to simplify the labor of teachers by dividing their labor process into easier, more basic steps to increase efficiency. Yet in the process of simplifying any labor, or in this case teachers' work, the work is stripped of its professional responsibility. When this happens, teachers no longer need to plan and implement curriculum. The result is to separate the conception of teaching from its execution in the classroom. The curriculum is controlled by outsiders and teachers simply make sure that the curriculum is followed.

When these curriculum packages complete with curriculum materials, learning objectives, student activities, and student evaluations, are used, then teachers simply manage the learning process rather than work to develop and institute curriculum best suited for their students' needs. The teachers have to depend on others to do that for which they were professionally trained. This process robs teachers of part of their responsibility and turns that control over to others.

On the surface, the deskilling process can appear to be a positive process in that it works to reduce teachers' workloads. Yet it occurs at the

expense of separating teachers from the conception of the curriculum development process and separates them from many of the important decisions necessary in successful teaching. The power of knowledge selection and the decision as to what counts as valid knowledge is given to educators who may not be directly associated with the school districts. It is also accompanied by a reskilling process whereby teachers become the managers of the learning process. As managers they make sure the learning process proceeds smoothly, but without making actual decisions as to what should be done in the classroom and how it should be done. This is a source of tension for teachers who struggle for some degree of curricular control. They want to try to make the curriculum fit their students' needs and interests, yet often feel that they do not have the time or power to do that.

It is important to emphasize that the teachers are being reskilled toward managerial roles, while at the same time the curriculum is being controlled by textbook publishers or other outside influences. This is an important development upon which educators should reflect. We must consider the role that teachers have played in recent decades in the curriculum development process and the role they should play in the future. Of course, educators want to improve schools for all children, considering the idea of how to be accountable to the public which provides the financial support for schools, while at the same time considering what is the best curriculum to meet their needs and values. Yet educators must include in that process a decision as to how active a role teachers should have in curriculum development. They must also consider to what degree teachers should be able to build on existing curriculum and whether they have sufficient time to actually be able to do so.

Conclusion

The process of separating teachers from curriculum development has been slow in coming. In recent decades, schools have gained close public attention in an attempt to react and adjust to the rapid social and political changes occurring nationally. At the same time, schools have been attempting to improve their curriculum by trying to develop a well planned, professionally developed curriculum. This has actually worked to strip teachers of many of their professional responsibilities. It also gives outsiders the power of knowledge selection and organization used in schools. It can work to severely limit what teachers can do in a classroom, as was evident in watching Burr Oaks School. We must ask if learning can be made to fit children's needs and interests without teachers having some power over curriculum formation. Will curriculum be as likely to present varying definitions and perspectives of knowledge without their input? Can teachers be active and involved participants in the learning process without greater control over the form of the curriculum? These questions must be seriously considered, for their answers will greatly influence our schools' ability to build a democratic curriculum for all students.

References

Adler, M. (1982). *The paideia proposal: An educational manifesto*.. New York: Macmillan.

Apple, M.W. (1982). Curricular form and the logic of technical control: Building the possessive individual. In Apple, M.W. (Ed.), *Cultural and economic reproduction in education* (pp. 247-274). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Apple, M.W. (1982b). *Education and power* . Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Apple, M.W. (1986). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education* . New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Astuto, T., & Clark, T. (1988). State responses to the new federalism in education. *Educational Policy 2* (4), 361-75.

Bastian, A., Fruchter, N., Gittell, M., Greer, C., & Haskins, K. (1985). *Choosing equality: The case for democratic schooling* . Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Bastian, A., Fruchter, N., Gittell, M., Greer, C., & Haskins, K. (Spring, 1985b). Choosing equality: The case for democratic schooling. *Social Policy 15* (4), 34-51.

Boyer, E. (1983). *High school: A report on secondary education in America* . New York: Harper & Row.

Carlson, D. (1985). Curriculum and the school work culture. In Altbach, P.G., Kelly, G.P., & Weis L. (Eds.), *Excellence in education: Perspectives on policy and practice* (pp. 171-181). Buffalo: Prometheus Books.

Carlson, D. (1988). Curriculum planning and the state: The Dynamics of control in education. In Beyer, L.E. & Apple, M.W. (Eds.), *The curriculum: Problems, politics, and possibilities* (pp. 98-115). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Clark, D., & Astuto, T.A. (1986, October). The significance and permanence of changes in federal education policy. *Educational researcher 15* (8), 4-13.

Connell, R.W. (1985). *Teachers' work*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.

Goodlad, J.I. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future* . New York: McGraw-Hill.

Kelly, G.P. (1985). Setting the boundaries of debate about education. In Altbach, P.G., Kelly, G.P., & Weis, L. (Eds.), *Excellence in education: Perspectives on policy and practice* (pp. 31-42). Buffalo: Prometheus Books.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform* . Washington D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office.

Shor, I. (1986). *Culture wars: School and society in the conservative restoration 1969-1984* . London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Slaughter, S. (1985). Main-traveled road or fast track: The liberal and technical in higher education reform. In Altbach, P.G., Kelly, G.P., & Weis, L. (Eds.), *Excellence in education: Perspectives on policy and practice* (pp. 107-123). Buffalo: Prometheus Books.

Spring, J. (1976). *The sorting machine: National educational policy since 1945* . New York: Longman.

Spring, J. (1985). Political and economic analysis. In Altbach, P.G., Kelly, G.P., & Weis, L. (Eds.), *Excellence in education: Perspectives on policy and practice* (pp. 75-89). Buffalo: Prometheus Books.

Tyack, D.B. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wise, A. (1979). *Legislated learning: The bureaucratization of the American classroom*. Berkeley: University of California Press.